

Redrawing the Line: Challenging the Publisher-Library Relationship

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*Within the scholarly ecosystem academia, libraries and publishers have evolved together over the last 150 years into an established order of publishing and dissemination. Massive changes in technology, disruptive publishing models and the globalisation of education have meant that this accepted order is being significantly challenged. This article outlines how the **University of Sussex Library** is working with **SAGE** publishing to develop a trusted relationship and an alternative space (both physical and metaphorical) for conversations and collaboration.*

Librarians have grown accustomed to colliding with academic publishers — over costs, over models, over access, over basically everything. We hit out at publishers at the first opportunity without possibly standing back and trying to understand why they are delivering their products in the way that they are. Worse still, by taking a stance that makes it very difficult to influence and educate each other of our pressing issues and “pain-points,” we reach deadlock.

We are essentially two very difficult beasts serving the same community — one overtly commercial, one less so. Traditionally the accepted order has been that a researcher deals with the publisher over publication, the publisher sells to the Library and then the Library provides access to the research community. The changes to publishing models (notably Open Access), to online fulfilment and in researcher behaviour (including the makeup of the researching and learning community) on top of a tightened financial outlook have rocked this traditional order. This disruption has opportunities — it gives us the chance to rethink our relationship with publishers — something we have begun to do at the **University of Sussex**.

The Library at the **University of Sussex** formed a partnership with **SAGE** publishing in 2010 that has grown and developed into a trusted relationship producing numerous innovative and supportive outcomes. The original proposal was based on a small gift from **SAGE** to the Library that supported various aspects of our Researcher Support Programme. Within the proposal, both parties agreed that the gift would support:

- The Research Hive¹ (a new dedicated space within the Library for the Sussex research community)
- Sussex Research Hive Scholarships (three newly established one-year scholarships which would be made available to experienced doctoral students to support the development of the Research Hive and to offer peer support to their Doctoral community)
- The Sussex Research Hive Seminar Series² (a recent addition to the Library's Researcher Support programme run with the intention of raising awareness of current issues affecting researchers)

This has been very successful — we have a well-loved space, our Research Hive Scholars are now an established and respected presence on campus and the Seminar Series is always very popular. However, what is really interesting about this relationship has been the unintended outcomes of this convergence and collaboration.

Sussex is just one of a number of UK libraries to have recently reconfigured its space to include a dedicated area for researchers. However, we were keen that this should not be just another reading room, but an environment which would bring researchers together and encourage exchange and partnership, breaking down traditional hierarchical and disciplinary boundaries. Our partnership with **SAGE** which enabled the creation of our Hive Scholar programme has allowed us to create a

space with an identity distinct from the rest of the Library building. The Scholarship scheme provides a unique model for peer-support which operates independently, but in liaison with, official University provision for researcher development. Each year, the Hive Scholars host a welcome event bringing together new and established researchers to share their experiences and develop networks, as well as events throughout the year, many of which emphasise researchers sharing their best practice. Where possible, these outputs (such as tips for first-year doctoral students) are shared with **SAGE**. In addition, through social media, the Scholars also ensure that the Research Hive is not purely a physical space.

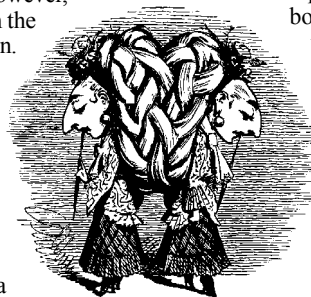
Our Research Hive Seminar series, originally developed by library staff as a response to lack of awareness of current issues within the research environment amongst our research community, provides **SAGE** with a window into the current concerns of academia. Covering topics such as research ethics, peer review, demonstrating research impact and new approaches to scholarly publishing, speakers are invited both from within the **Sussex** research community and externally. **SAGE** staff are invited and encouraged to attend (and sometimes contribute) to the sessions, allowing them access to frank discussions and a unique opportunity, in a collegial environment, to gain a better understanding of the concerns of the wider community of academics and librarians with which they are so closely linked.

We aren't skilled at marketing in our Library — some of us maybe have a better idea than others about what constitutes an effective campaign, but this is a serious problem when now, more than ever, we need to be marketing our services and our skills to our users and show our value to the institution. **SAGE** — on the other hand — has an entire highly accomplished and experienced marketing team. Productive meetings where we transferred skills, ideas, and learned the basics of good marketing from knowledgeable professionals have been absolutely invaluable. **SAGE** even devised us a bespoke **Sussex** toolkit that has enabled us to sensibly set up and monitor our marketing campaigns for this year. We are currently working with them to improve the usage of some underused online resources, supplying email addresses for them to target as well as working with them on long-term trials to truly assess the value of a new resource using data collected by both **SAGE** and ourselves.

One of the holy grails for both libraries and publishers is to work out exactly what information undergraduates are gathering, evaluating and using, how this behaviour is changing and the effect it has on how they wish information to be presented to them. The partnership has already offered us numerous opportunities to investigate this, bringing **SAGE** closer to the student body at **Sussex** through support for user testing on our new discovery systems as well as, of course, focus groups. This important work has now culminated in the launch in October 2013 of a three-year undergraduate **SAGE** Scholarship.³ This programme will follow three students across the Social Science disciplines from their induction weeks up to graduation. Through blog postings, student-led surveys and focus groups, drawing in the views and experiences of their peers, the students will provide invaluable feedback both to **SAGE** and the Library on topics relating to their use of information. The overall aim of the project is to see whether their behaviour changes throughout their degree course, but we hope it will also help us respond appropriately to their requirements and allow their views and requirements to help shape and impact our services — and **SAGE** products.

Through this closer, more trusted relationship we have built up connections with **SAGE** across the Library, not just within our Research Support and

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e-resource acquisition teams but with Learning and Teaching and Technical Support. Within the wider University, new partnerships are being formed with our Doctoral School and with the Academic Schools themselves. Publishers play a hugely important role in academia and through a number of initiatives developed as part of this partnership we have been able to demystify and educate both our staff and, we hope, possibly some **SAGE** staff too. The Hive Scholars make requests for **SAGE** staff to come and speak to research students about topics such as getting their thesis published or how to publish Open Access. Our Hive Scholars have an annual visit to **SAGE** to talk to a large group about their research and to take questions on what they might require as researchers today, providing valuable insights on their barriers to finding information, how they tackle copyright issues or how they view their research data.

It was from this basis of shared trust that we contributed positively to an Open Access campaign that **SAGE** launched in 2013 which we felt was a little misleading and could prove sensitive to those institutions who quite obviously were not going to have enough funds to fulfil the RCUK Policy on Open Access.⁴ Instead of publically “naming and shaming” the publisher — as happened in so many cases when the community disagrees with a model or a price — we communicated with them, entering into a dialogue and hopefully understood a little more about each other’s issues at the end of it.

The introduction of this new Open Access Policy from RCUK (which represents seven of the UK’s main research funders) in April 2013 has had a huge impact on many academic libraries in the UK, as we start to grapple with the processing of APC payments. As we move from supporting researchers as consumers of

information to actually helping them to generate information, it is more important that we are able to understand the whole publication process as it relates to the research lifecycle. We have had to gently include ourselves in the research process right from the beginning, working with the University’s Research Office to provide advice to researchers on how to demonstrate compliance with policies as part of funding applications, but stopping short of influencing which publication a researcher publishes in (although many of us hope our advocacy work at least goes some way to informing the selection). This means we are learning and having to understand the editorial process, authorship issues, versions, rights clearance and the licence to publish. Collaborating with a publisher and working with the whole organisation from those in editorial and public relations to the usual contacts in marketing and sales has definitely resulted in a better informed staff here in the Library at **Sussex**.

The current climate of increased financial scrutiny and accountability of publicly funded institutions within the UK can have a negative impact upon creativity and willingness to take risks. Within academic libraries, our operational goals are closely aligned with the strategy of our parent institution, and we are under constant pressure to demonstrate that we are using our budget to meet them effectively. This can make innovation difficult. Our relationship with a private institution frees us to experiment outside the usual boundaries imposed by the public sector: our Hive Scholars do not use public funds, are not employees of the University and so are not limited by job descriptions or operational plans. They are able to use their time and budget to deliver what they see as being needed by their community, and this independence allows them to address some of the thornier issues for doctoral researchers which would not otherwise be supported by the University, for example a practical session on how to deal with problems with doctoral

supervisors. The Scholars operate in a safe environment where they are free to try new initiatives without fear of failure, where a lack of success is instead seen as an opportunity for reflection and learning.

Our relationship with **SAGE** is one which has been able to develop and grow according to the needs of its partners and in response to the external environment. We carefully record the outputs so that we are able to demonstrate the value of the partnership for each side. Each year we discuss with **SAGE** any new initiatives that either side would like to work on, and then put together a bid for funds. As the scholarly publishing environment is changing so fast its important that the partnership not only have both medium- and longer-term goals but that both sides agree to be flexible enough to respond to shorter-term issues and problems. It is this flexibility and enthusiasm for this relationship (from both **SAGE** and **Sussex**) that make it a success, along with the excitement of developing something tangible together, bringing together both public and private funds which go beyond the traditional sponsorship of public space. 🌱

*Authors’ Note: With thanks to **Bernie Folan** and **Mithu Lucraft** and **SAGE** staff especially **Katie Sayers**, **Sanphy Thomas**, and **Jane Makoff**. — **JH & JB***

Endnotes

1. <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/research/hive>
2. <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/research/seminarsandevents/seminars2014>
3. <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/internal/bulletin/staff/2013-14/081113/sagescholars?ref=e-mail>
4. <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/outputs/>